

**Statement of the Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
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Charge d’Affaires ad interim**

**Hearing on “Ethiopia’s Troubled Internal Situation”
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations
Committee on International Relations
U.S. House of Representatives
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate this opportunity to present the views of the Government of Ethiopia regarding the topic of this hearing. Our perspective is far more optimistic than the title given to this hearing may suggest, yet this optimism is grounded in the experiential reality of life and politics in Ethiopia today.

Indeed, we reject the notion that Ethiopia faces a “troubled internal situation.” While I do not wish to play the role of Pollyanna and suggest that all is well and can never be better, I do wish to emphasize that the growing pains of an emerging democracy should not be mistaken for tyranny, which is the exaggerated picture that opponents of Ethiopia’s constitutional government want you to see.

Let me divide my comments into three major sections: First, some historical perspective; second, a look at the current situation; and third, reasons for optimism in the future.

Historical Perspective

Ethiopia and the United States have a friendship that has lasted more than a century. The two countries first established diplomatic relations in 1903. At the time, Ethiopia was one of only two independent countries in Africa (the other being Liberia). Ethiopia had been able to maintain its independence despite the relentless efforts of European colonizers to carve up the African continent like pieces of a postprandial pie.

The Ethiopian-American friendship – and partnership in the pursuit of common interests – was interrupted only by the brutal dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who came to power in a bloody military coup in 1974 and who was deposed 17 years later through the concerted sacrifice and determination of the Ethiopian people who persistently fought his reign of terror. One writer characterized Mengistu as someone “who held the singular distinction of being the most brutal tyrant on a continent known for brutal tyrants,”¹ explaining that Mengistu distinguished himself

¹ Lawrence Person, “Exit the Dictator, Stage Left: Ethiopia After Mengistu,” *Terra Nova*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 103.

not only by his ruthless imposition of Marxist dogma on an unwilling populace, but also for the opulence of his ruling party's lifestyle in the midst of the decade's worst famine."² His military regime reoriented the government and the national economy from capitalism to Marxism. It maintained a monolithic government and party structure, which kept a tight rein on the economy and society. The Workers' Party of Ethiopia, organized according to the Leninist principle of "democratic centralism", was the sole legitimate party in the country. It was a system that outlawed and suppressed political dissent and pursued policies, which are of authoritarian in nature and hostile to democratic governances.

Mr. Chairman, almost exactly 20 years ago, on the other side of Capitol Hill, the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate held a hearing on the topic: "Ethiopia Update: Forced Population Removal and Human Rights." In introducing the hearing, Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum, who was presiding in the absence of the chairman, said:

In late 1984, the Ethiopian Government initiated a policy of resettling Ethiopians from the northern drought-stricken areas where liberation movements have been waging war against the central government for some 20 years, to the fertile, less densely populated southern and Western regions of the country.

The Government's goal is to relocate approximately 1.8 million people. To date, an estimated 600,000 have been moved....

According to sources both in Government and out, there is reason to believe that 100,000 human beings have died as a direct result of the resettlement program. The American people have responded generously and without concern for the ideology of the Marxist government of Ethiopia, when hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians were suffering from drought and famine last year [1985].

Our concern for saving Ethiopian lives last year led to a massive United States Government and private sector effort to provide food and relief supplies to Ethiopia. Today, however, we find that the threat to Ethiopian lives comes not from famine but from the Ethiopian government.³

A few minutes later, Senator Rudy Boschwitz made a fitting historical analogy:

Very frankly, it sounds to me that what is happening in Ethiopia is more like the twenties and thirties in Russia when they collectivized and upward of 30 million

² Ibid., p. 101.

³ "Ethiopia Update: Forced Population Removal and Human Rights," Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session, March 6, 1986 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 1.

people were killed, including about a third of those being Ukrainians. Now it appears that something similar to that is occurring in Ethiopia.⁴

And then Senator Paul Trible spoke of his own observations from his trip to Ethiopia:

I have walked the feeding camps of Ethiopia. I met with the principals of the Mengistu government. And I think it is very clear what Comrade Mengistu is about. His is a ruthless government. He is far more interested in maintaining power than he is in improving the woeful condition of these people.

At best, the Mengistu regime has evidenced a most callous disregard for life. At worst, Mengistu has carried out a march of death, a conscious policy of genocide.⁵

Finally, one of the witnesses at that hearing, Jason W. Clay of Cultural Survival, Inc., “a non-profit human rights organization located in Cambridge, Massachusetts,” testified:

Since 1980, our interviews with refugees from each of the major ethnic groups in Ethiopia indicate that the present government is attempting to systematically destroy culturally distinct groups within the country. This systematic destruction appears to be based on the goal of creating a strong central state upon which each local community is dependent.⁶

Mr. Chairman, I offer this short history lesson to indicate the situation from which present-day Ethiopia was forced to emerge. The Mengistu regime oppressed the people and repressed civil society. When our country was liberated from the dictatorship 15 years ago, our people had little idea of what self-government meant and even less experience of it.

What we faced in 1991 was succinctly explained by political scientist Richard Joseph of Emory University:

Ethiopia’s new government, led by Meles Zenawi, was left with the task of satisfying a number of competing imperatives – conducting democratic elections...; reassuring international donors of his regimes commitment to democratic pluralism...; and respecting freedoms of assembly, organization, and expression in a country that had never previously enjoyed them (and in which many political groups preferred to settle disagreements by resort to

⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

arms). Since 1991, the new regime has achieved a high degree of presentability and has overcome or defused many of these challenges.⁷

The transition from Communist dictatorship to emerging democracy was not immediate. Several steps had to be taken along the way. We first had to deal with what Hans Binnendijk of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London called “revolutionary restructuring” in an article that, despite being written in 1987 (four years before Mengistu was driven from power), seems to be a remarkably prescient description of what actually occurred in the early years of the new Ethiopia:

Transition in a revolutionary situation need not always lead to a complete collapse of society. Once the autocrat is off the scene, a transition can bring a restructuring of the government within the institutions of the old society. This type of transition generally promotes a more stable outcome in the long-term and can in fact lead to strengthened ties with the United States

The revolutionary restructuring model generally includes street confrontations between supporters and opponents of the autocrat, but the transition itself is usually relatively bloodless. The autocrat usually flees the country or is arrested. Many of the existing economic, social, and political institutions remain basically intact. New political leaders emerge to run the government, and elements of the former military leadership either share power or acquiesce in civilian leadership. The new leadership is more pragmatic than ideological, less inclined to seek or hold power through violent means, and generally has some government experience.⁸

As I have indicated, the transition from dictatorship to democracy was complex. Immediately after the fall of the military regime a Transitional Government, composed of the then active political parties in the country was established. Pursuant to the mandate entrusted to it through the Transitional Charter, the Transitional Government laid the necessary conditions that led towards the adoption of the 1995 Constitution.

The 1995 Constitution marked a transition towards multiparty democracy. It provides for a federal state structure with nine member states making up the federation. It enshrined fundamental principles aimed at ensuring a democratic order and a political community founded on the rule of law. It is important to note here those principles such as Sovereignty of the People, Supremacy of the Constitution, the inalienability and inviolability of Human and Democratic Rights and the establishment of Accountability of Government.

⁷ Richard Joseph, “Africa, 1990-1997: From *Abertura* to Closure,” in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Democratization in Africa* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 8.

⁸ Hans Binnendijk, “Authoritarian Regimes in Transition,” reprinted in Brad Roberts, ed., *The New Democracies: Global Change and U.S. Policy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 219-220.

Democratization has taken a center stage in the development discourse of today's Ethiopian politics. We recognize that there can be neither development nor stability without democracy. It is on the basis of such conviction that the Ethiopian Government has put in place conducive legal, policy and administrative frameworks that have concretely helped to implant and nurture democracy in the last decade.

In fact, establishing a democratic order is a long process that presupposes the building up and strengthening of institutions of democratic governance in the country. In this regard, Ethiopia has so far taken a series of measures to develop and strengthen democratic institutions that play important roles in monitoring misadministration, ensuring the protection of human rights and guarding against corruption. Accordingly, it has statutorily established the Ombudsman Office, the Human Rights Commission and the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission. Ethiopia is also a party to major international and regional human rights treaties and is duly discharging its treaty obligations. The ongoing justice sector reform is also worth noting in this regard.

Democracy also implies the existence of a multi-party system and the holding of periodic elections. Ethiopia has come a long way in this regard. Since 1991, it adopted a multi-party system and has so far held three periodic elections, which over the course of time have demonstrated significant improvements. The U.S. Department of State summarizes this period nicely in its latest “Background Note” on Ethiopia, published just two months ago:

In Ethiopia, President Meles Zenawi and members of the [Transitional Government of Ethiopia] pledged to oversee the formation of a multi-party democracy. The election for a 547-member constituent assembly was held in June 1994, and this assembly adopted the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in December 1994. The elections for Ethiopia's first popularly chosen national parliament and regional legislatures were held in May and June 1995. Most opposition parties chose to boycott these elections, ensuring a landslide victory for the EPRDF. International and non-governmental observers concluded that opposition parties would have been able to participate had they chosen to do so. The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was installed in August 1995...

Political parties include the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), and other small parties. Suffrage is universal at age 18.

In 2003, Ethiopia continued its transition from a unitary to a federal system of government. The EPRDF-led government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has promoted a policy of ethnic federalism, devolving significant powers to regional, ethnically based authorities. Ethiopia today has 9 semi-autonomous

administrative regions and two special city administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa), which have the power to raise their own revenues.⁹

The Current Situation

This brings us to the events of the past year, events which brought us into this room to discuss Ethiopia's internal situation. We are here because of what happened after last May's highly successful parliamentary and local government elections, which increased the number of opposition party Members of Parliament from 12 to 172 and gave opposition parties all but one seat on the Addis Ababa city council.

The Third National and Regional elections held on May 15, 2005 represents a landmark in the advancement of democracy in Ethiopia. More than 27 million people were registered for the election, out of which 90% casted their votes. 77 political parties and 575 independent candidates have contested for seats in the Federal Parliament and State Councils. Over three hundred international observers and tens of thousands of local observers monitored the election process.

International and domestic observers of the elections agreed that they were conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner. For example, the Carter Center sent a delegation of observers who concluded:

The May 15 parliamentary elections were Ethiopia's third national elections following elections in 1995 and 2000. The 2005 elections took place in a highly contested environment and in a diverse country where regional considerations are influential and with the majority of voters in rural areas.

In contrast with previous national elections, the 2005 elections were sharply contested and offered Ethiopian citizens a democratic choice for the first time in their long history. The ruling party took the initiative to negotiate with the opposition and level the playing field, and agreed to a number of important electoral reforms that created conditions for a more open and genuinely competitive process. The early negotiations between parties were, in and of themselves, a step forward for the democratization process in Ethiopia.

The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) implemented these reforms and adopted other important measures to increase transparency and responsiveness to political parties. Civil society organizations contributed greatly to the electoral process by organizing public forums, conducting voter education training, and deploying domestic observers. Most importantly, the Ethiopian public demonstrated their commitment to democracy through their active and enthusiastic participation in the May 15 poll. As a result of these efforts and

⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Ethiopia," January 2006; found at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm>.

others by diverse Ethiopian actors and institutions, the overwhelming majority of Ethiopians had the opportunity to make a meaningful choice in the May 15 elections. This significant accomplishment has the potential to lead to further democratization and to consolidate multiparty competition.¹⁰

The Carter Center report continues to say that, while some complaints about individual constituency results were credible, “the majority of the constituency results based on the May 15 polling and tabulation are credible and reflect competitive conditions.”¹¹

The U.S. State Department in its statement of 16 September 2005 recognized the election "to stand out as a milestone in creating a new, more competitive multi-party political system".

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, as experienced candidates and political leaders, you know that no election is flawless, even in a mature democracy. (For instance, in 2004 the Washington state gubernatorial race was forced into a recount and many weeks of court hearings and rulings by judges about the validity of ballots and complaints about the process. This past December, the state of Virginia carried out a recount for its state’s Attorney General contest. And I need not remind you of the controversy surrounding the 2000 presidential election in Florida.)

Ethiopia is learning, through experience, how to become a better democracy. We are pleased that international observers, such as those from the Carter Center, agree that Ethiopia is on the right path. The fact that opposition parties increased their seats in Parliament from 12 to 172 is evidence of progress, since a robust democracy depends in large part on the participation of an active and loyal opposition, engaging the majority party in debate, respectfully challenging the positions of the Prime Minister and his cabinet, and helping to hone proposed legislation into good, strong and effective law for the benefit of all the people.

Let me add that, despite protestation and calls for boycott by the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), a coalition of four political parties, more than 89 of its elected representatives have taken the seats in Parliament, seats that they won in fair, competitive elections. That number appears to be growing as constituents tell their elected representatives that a boycott is nothing but being on the outside looking in, rather than on the inside making a difference.

The new MPs have been embraced by their fellows. The Speaker of the House of Peoples Representatives made special effort to provide the necessary support for the newly elected legislators. He has made sure that members of opposition parties are included in delegations to international parliamentary conferences. All Members are invited to participate in debates over the issues of the day and proposed legislation that will affect the lives of their constituents.

¹⁰ Final Statement on The Carter Center Observation of the Ethiopia 2005 National Elections, September 2005; found at <http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/2199.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Our country's parliamentary elections were followed by violence and demonstrations instigated by some groups and individuals who became disgruntled when their preferred outcome was not the same as the result on Election Day.

A few days after the elections took place, a group of opposition leaders asserted that fraud or vote rigging had taken place in a number of constituencies and insisted that the results be nullified. Following the submission of complaints by the contending political parties, the independent National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) set up a transparent complaint review mechanism, which was also endorsed by the major opposition parties. The NEBE investigated all of the cases – something that severely taxed the board's resources – and concluded that in 31 cases, there was sufficient evidence of fraud or other irregularities that new elections were ordered. What was odd about the list of 299 constituencies against which complaints were filed, however, was that it included some districts in which the opposition parties had fielded no candidates and others in which the opposition candidates had won the election! It was clear that the list had been drawn up prior to election day with the intention that it would be used to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the electoral process, regardless of the actual outcome of the vote. The Carter Center in its Final report noted, "Within the universe of seats impacted by the complaint process, many of these cases lacked sufficient evidence to warrant challenging the result."

If only such an anecdote represented the worst of what happened in the weeks following the election. Unfortunately, in June and again in November 2005, people were killed and injured in public insurrections in Addis Ababa and other places – this much is true. What is not often reported in the news media is that demonstrators came armed with clubs and grenades and guns. Policemen were killed and injured, too, while trying to keep the peace. In addition, a significant amount of public as well as private property was destroyed and looted by the "demonstrators." These public insurrections were unfortunately called by hardcore elements of the CUD, who rejected the outcome of the election and vowed to disrupt the constitutional order and persistently engaged themselves in fomenting riots and inciting violence.

I would like to make another historical point, this time drawn from the histories of other countries besides Ethiopia. Incidents such as those we experienced last June and last November are not unique to contemporary times. Other democracies have experienced incidents like those as they developed, grew and matured.

For example,

- in 1918 in Canada, there were protest demonstrations against a new military conscription law. On April 1 of that year, four men were killed when the army opened fire on a crowd in Quebec City. The coroner's inquest would later show that these men were pedestrians who had not been involved in the protests.¹²
- in May 1886 at Haymarket Square in Chicago, there was a demonstration by laborers and their supporters who were demanding an eight-hour work day. When policemen

¹² "Conscription Crisis of 1917," *Wikipedia*, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_Crisis_of_1917.

attempted to disperse the meeting, a bomb exploded and rioting ensued. Seven policemen and four other persons were killed, and more than 100 persons were wounded.¹³

- in May 1894, federal troops were sent to break up a strike by Pullman car workers in Illinois. President Grover Cleveland sent 2,000 soldiers and by the end of the strike, 13 strikers were killed and 57 were wounded. An estimated \$80,000 worth of property was damaged.¹⁴

These were all regrettable incidents. They are inexcusable but they are lessons from history that show how it is possible to learn from mistakes.

In the aftermath of last year's violence in Ethiopia, a number of individuals involved in the violence were arrested. Of these, a huge majority was released without being charged. There are fewer than 170 people in custody today. They are charged and awaiting trial.

In every case, those arrested and charged have access to legal counsel and are able to communicate with their families. My government respects the due process of law, and wants to see justice satisfied in every one of the cases that resulted from the violent actions of the past few months. Those who are acquitted will be free to return to their homes and businesses, while those who are found guilty will be sentenced according to the law.

We firmly believe that the true measure of democracy is its dispensation to justice. Hence we urge everyone to let the judicial process take its course.

Moreover, in an effort to prevent such violence from occurring in the future, Parliament has established an independent inquiry commission, consisting of religious leaders, jurists, and civic activists, which is not only looking into the root causes of the violence, but examining the behavior of the police and security forces. We understand that, as Ethiopia develops into a more mature democracy, public demonstrations of sentiment in favor of an issue or against another will become more frequent. We want such demonstrations to be peaceful in their goals and in their practice.

Drawing lesson from the last elections, the Government is now taking measures to reform the procedure and code of conduct of the House, to enhance the implementation capacity of the National Electoral Board and review and enhance the media laws. Accordingly, the Government hired foreign consultants, to undertake studies and present a comparative analysis in light of the experiences of four countries with rich democratic traditions, i.e. Germany, United Kingdom, Canada and India. We believe that this approach would not only pave the way to adapt the experience of other countries to our objective reality, but would also ensure that views of all stakeholders are taken on board. It is my humble view that this process would help narrow the

¹³ "Haymarket Square riot," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, 2001-05, at <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ha/Haymarke.html>.

¹⁴ "Pullman Strike," *Wikipedia*, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pullman_Strike.

differences among political parties and promote a healthy competition and cooperative spirit.

Concerning the Rules of Procedure and the code of conduct of the House of Peoples Representatives, the consultants have now completed their study. And it is expected that the political parties in the House would soon start negotiation on the basis of the study with a view to reforming the rules of procedure and codes of conduct of the House.

The foreign consultants have also finalized and submitted their report on the reform and enhancement of the capacity of the National Election Board of Ethiopia. Once the Plan of Action is finalized, the matter will be presented for discussion for the political parties in the parliament. After the necessary revision of the election law, it is expected that the House in accordance with the Constitution will appoint a new electoral board.

The review of the media law is indeed in progress. We hope it will be finalized in the coming few months. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the United States Government for its support in this process.

At this point I would like to address what should be expected of the political opposition in Ethiopia, individuals and groups whom we hope understand what it means to be the “loyal opposition” as that term is used in mature parliamentary democracies such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and India.

As you know, whether owing to internal disarray or a purposeful attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the Ethiopian government, some political figures chose to boycott Parliament even after they were elected to serve their constituents.

In addressing a similar situation some years ago, Professor Christopher Lingle of the University of Natal pointed out the irresponsibility of such a stance:

It would seem apparent that those who endorse ... election boycotts have not examined the issues fully. In all events, the call for [a] boycott has occurred without offering a fully articulated, coherent set of alternatives. It is certainly the case, for a variety of reasons, that the issues related to the boycott have not been aired openly ... As a consequence, a strong argument is made that the most likely result of continued rejection of the use of existing political structures will be violent upheaval.¹⁵

It must be understood, not least by supporters of the mass democratic movement, that participation in democratic structures necessarily involves bargaining and compromise – not to be confused with co-optation. In the worst of all possible worlds, continued non-participation simply insures that the least principled and most unscrupulous individuals will be able to take what power there is and benefit

¹⁵ Christopher Lingle, “Strategies of Participation,” *Southern African Freedom Review*, Autumn 1989, p. 1.

materially from political office. By allowing the more readily corruptible to occupy political space, non-participation is counterproductive: instead of progressive leaders developing inroads to advance the objectives of the mass democratic movement, less scrupulous elements set about to line their own pockets.¹⁶

As a practical matter, Professor Lingle points out, participation in public office brings with it increased access to the media, legal protections associated with holding public office, “and a means to develop and expand a political power base.” Refusal to participate fully in electoral politics, he argues, results in “real costs which hinder the desired outcomes. The costs of refusal to participate are well defined. New strategies must be developed to avoid or minimize these costs.”¹⁷

One of these costs has been international ridicule. Some of you may have seen an article that appeared in the well-respected, London-based newsletter, *Africa Confidential*, last month. The article said, in part:

Nine months after May’s controversial elections, Addis Ababa’s councillors have still not taken their seats. The four-party opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) won the capital by a landslide, taking 137 of 138 council seats and all 23 of the region’s parliamentary seats. The coalition (All Ethiopia Unity Party, AEUP; Kestedamena (Rainbow Ethiopia); Ethiopian Democratic League, EDL; and United Ethiopia Democratic Party, UEDP-Medhin) then refused to take its parliamentary or council seats, as a protest against election abuses (AC Vol 47 No 1 & Vol 46 No 23). Splits have since weakened its members’ resolve but there’s still no city government.

Most members of the CUD Central Committee opposed a boycott but, with strong support from exiles in the United States, CUD Chairman Hailu Shawal, who firmly opposed participation, outmanoeuvred them. Hailu was aiming to turn the coalition into a single party, in which his own AEUP’s majority would give it control. The CUD’s other main component, UEDP-Medhin, walked out. It now has a new chairman, Lidetu Ayelew, and almost all its members of parliament have taken their seats.

Most CUD MPs – 92 of 109 – have decided to do the same and are busy organising party caucuses and new leaderships for AEUP and Rainbow, to allow full legislative participation. The government has met some opposition demands. Consultants from Canada, Germany, India and Britain are reviewing parliamentary procedures; others are reviewing the press law and the National

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

Electoral Board (NEB).¹⁸

You have no doubt heard the expression – I think it was expressed in the first Spider-Man movie, but that does not diminish its truth – that “With great power comes great responsibility.” Political influence and political activism also entail great responsibility. Our concern that some opposition groups in Ethiopia, whether because they are squabbling amongst themselves or because they are working purposefully to undermine the constitutional order of our country, is shared by U.S. officials, as well. It is worth noting that, at a news briefing last December 5, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer stated:

I must say also that it's the responsibility of the opposition as well because when the opposition takes stones and pelts the police forces, they have to respect the rule of law when they're demonstrating freely. And so I think that the responsibility -- this is true of Ethiopia but it's true across Africa -- there's responsibility that has to be there for both the opposition and for the government. Whereas we hold the governments even more accountable because they are supposed to be the upholders of the rule of law, we still must say when the opposition goes out of bounds as such.

And this is a very diverse opposition in Ethiopia. There are some who are demonstrating to sit in parliament, to create greater democratic space. There [are] others who are demonstrating to overthrow the government. And that's true that there are different -- there are some who want to reclaim Eritrea.

So this opposition – there [are] democrats within the opposition and there are non-democrats within the opposition.¹⁹

The overarching ramifications of Dr. Frazer's remarks about the importance of the rule of law are taken very seriously in Ethiopia. Ethiopians share a reverence for the rule of law, and of due process of law. We share the view of law professor Daniel D. Ntanda Nsereko of the University of Botswana, who wrote in *Human Rights Quarterly*:

Law is the antidote to anarchy. It recognizes personal rights and imposes duties on citizens. It also regulates the relations between citizens among themselves and between the citizens and the community as a corporate body. In general, the law prescribes what is acceptable conduct for the society it governs.

Observance of the law, particularly law that is consonant with the principles of human rights, is essential to the continued existence of civil society and to societal harmony. The blessings of life under a civil society would doubtless be

¹⁸ “Ethiopia: Waiting but not Sitting,” *Africa Confidential*, Vol 47, No. 4, 17 February 2006.

¹⁹ “Africa Update: Democracy and Human Rights,” Briefing at Foreign Press Center, December 5, 2005, at <http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/rm/2006/59842.htm>.

jeopardize, if not lost, were the law not observed. Fortunately, the majority of citizens will normally observe the law voluntarily, since they appreciate the importance and the advantages of so doing. However, there will always be a minority of citizens who, out of carelessness, selfishness, or social maladaptation, will flout the law, disrupting relations within and causing suffering to the community. As a preventative, civil society establishes mechanisms for dealing with these disruptive elements. The mechanisms are used to remind or coerce these elements to conform with the accepted standards of conduct or simply to deter them from their unacceptable conduct, and generally to secure safety and security for all citizens.²⁰

I can assure you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, that Ethiopia's government and people are both equally committed to respect for the rule of law and to seeing that all those accused of crimes are accorded full due process of law, no matter what they are charged with.

My government believes that peaceful resolution of political differences is the best for Ethiopia. We believe that the ruling and loyal opposition parties should not be viewed as adversaries. Rather they should be viewed as political forces that work in harmony for the betterment of the lives of all Ethiopians. It is in this same spirit that the government has also been engaging itself with the civil society in the democratic process of the country.

Reasons for Optimism

While the political situation in Ethiopia gives us much to ponder, I remain convinced that there are reasons to be optimistic about the future. Let me briefly mention just a few of these reasons.

First, democratization has taken a center stage in the development discourse of today's Ethiopian politics. Despite the challenges, Ethiopia is moving on the right direction towards democratization.

A second reason for optimism is that Ethiopia is experiencing strong economic growth. Our gross domestic product grew by 11.5 percent in 2004 and 9 percent in 2005. Despite drought, the agricultural sector has grown by 15 percent and exports have grown by 24.5 percent in the past year. Primary school enrollment rate, which was 61 percent in 2000/2001 grew to 79 percent in 2004/2005. Coverage of health services at about the same time grew from 52 to 70 percent. Infant mortality rate (under age five), which was 167/1000 in 2002/2003, declined to 97/1000. There is a construction boom in Addis Ababa and other cities, with residences, offices, retail shops, and manufacturing facilities being built at an unprecedented rate.

²⁰ Daniel D. Ntanda Nsereko, "The Police, Human Rights, and the Constitution: An African Perspective," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August 1993), pp. 465-66.

Third, despite increasing tensions between religious groups in many countries of the world, the major religions live in harmony in Ethiopia – so much so that we humbly offer our experience as a model for other religiously pluralistic countries.

A fourth reason for optimism is the recent U.S. diplomatic initiative to bring about a permanent settlement for the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict. The situation is still delicate, but with commitment and cooperation from the other side, we can envision demarcation of the border in an orderly fashion that assures lasting peace between our countries. Success, however, depends on the support of the international community and assurances of confidence from friends like the United States.

In conclusion, I would like to return to my opening remarks about the close friendship between Ethiopia and the United States. This is not simply a diplomatic friendship between distant states. No, it is in many ways a relationship of kith and kin. There are, according to the best estimates, about half a million people of Ethiopian descent living in the United States. This includes not just recent immigrants, but the children and grandchildren of immigrants as well. Some 100,000 Ethiopian-Americans live in the Washington metropolitan area alone. I am sure that each Member of this subcommittee can number Ethiopian-Americans among your constituents – in fact, I am certain you have heard from some of them in the days leading up to this hearing.

We are not claiming to have a perfect multi-party democracy in Ethiopia. But we believe that we are on the right track. And we are making progress. We are hopeful that the US Government will continue to provide its support and assistance in our democratization endeavors.

I can say, with confidence, that neither the government of Ethiopia nor the people of Ethiopia desire any action or event that will jeopardize our friendship with the government and people of the United States. We highly regard our reciprocal relationship – the ways in which we share cultural, social, and spiritual values; our alliance in the global war on terrorism, which threatens civilization at its roots; our trade and investment ties. I trust that the Members of this subcommittee, and all Members of the United States Congress, hold our friendship in the same high regard.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this hearing. I hope that I have sufficiently addressed your concerns and will be happy to answer any questions you may wish to pose.